

# Strangers on a Tram: Space, Time, Power, and Performance in Franz Kafka's *Der Fahrgast* and Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben*

## Abstract

This article compares two encounters on trams: a scene from **Ruth Klüger's *weiter leben*** and **Franz Kafka's *Der Fahrgast***. It suggests that **narrative spaces** are **performative** and **narrative time** complicates performances of identity. Both scenes construct apparent dichotomies between male and female, old and young, subject and object, binaries that are made ambiguous by the topography of **theatricalization and cinema**. The article introduces the concepts of '**spatial and temporal concertinas**', whereby shifts in perspective alter **power dynamics**. The analysis suggests that the depiction of bodies, space, and time offers insight into aspects of identity and subjectivity that otherwise remain hidden.

This article is about encounters: strangers silently entering into dialogue in the public and mobile spaces of transport. It also seeks to set up another kind of encounter, namely the literary encounter between two texts from different periods of history and different perspectives: Franz Kafka's 1913 short story *Der Fahrgast* and a single scene from Ruth Klüger's 1992 autobiography *weiter leben*. The aim of this unusual comparison of two works that tell a strikingly similar story but with no direct inter-referentiality is to engender a discussion about the significance of bodies, space, and time in the construction of identity, power, and performance.

Both Kafka's *Der Fahrgast* and a scene from Klüger's *weiter leben* show two strangers on trams entering into silent dialogues with one another. Kafka's narrator watches a

young woman on the platform of the tram, about to alight.<sup>1</sup> He (if we assume the narrator is a man) wonders at the girl's appearance and retrospectively questions why she did not respond to him in some way. Klüger recollects a childhood incident when a man on a tram saw her wearing the yellow star and secretly offered her an orange in a gesture of pity. Klüger accepted the gift but felt forced into playing 'die mir zugeteilte Rolle des dankbaren Judenkindes'.<sup>2</sup> Kafka's story is one of his *Betrachtung* collection but may be read in isolation; Klüger's scene is only a short part of her autobiography, so needs to be seen in context. Although it is possible to elide Kafka with his narrator, his story is not overtly anything other than fiction, while Klüger's is explicitly memoir. Kafka and Klüger are both German-language Jewish writers of non-German origin (from Prague and Vienna, respectively). But the historical contexts – Kafka writing just before World War One and Klüger remembering early World War Two – are crucially different. Kafka writes from the perspective of a marginalized minority, albeit as an adult male;<sup>3</sup> Klüger recalls an acutely critical situation, publicly forced to wear the yellow star after the *Anschluss* of Austria, exposed and vulnerable as a child, a girl, and a Jew. The retrospective voice in Klüger's case constructs a dialogue between narrating self and experiencing self, complicating the presentation of identity.

---

<sup>1</sup> Franz Kafka, 'Der Fahrgast', in *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch, Wolf Kittler, and Gerhard Neumann (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1994), pp. 26–27; all citations refer to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Klüger, *weiter leben: Eine Jugend* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), p. 52; all citations refer to this edition and the passage on the tram occurs on pp. 50–52.

<sup>3</sup> See: Ritchie Robertson, *Kafka: Judaism, Politics, and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 2–3.

Independently, each scene gives rise to a unique analysis. Critics have discussed Kafka's *Betrachtung* in general and *Der Fahrgast* in particular in terms of the importance of gesture – unspoken behavioural exchanges – as well as the filmic style adopted by Kafka as a result of his enthusiasm for early cinema.<sup>4</sup> Both of these aspects are central to the focus on viewing in this scene. Like Klüger's encounter on the tram, Kafka's story seemingly sets up a set of binaries: male and female, old and young, viewer and viewed, active and passive. But the construction of space and time in this short scene indicates the intricate ways in which Kafka creates precarious senses of identity, characters who may at once seem dominant and yet uncertain.

The feminist voice of Klüger's *weiter leben* has been the subject of many critical readings;<sup>5</sup> in a related vein, Carmel Finnan has considered gender in the context of 'the

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter-André Alt, *Kafka und der Film: Über kinematographisches Erzählen* (München: C.H. Beck, 2009); Silke Horstkotte, 'Kinematographisches Erzählen oder Poetik des "wenn": Zur Mobilisierung des Sehens in *Betrachtung*', in *Kafkas Betrachtung: Neue Lektüren*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger and Dora Osborne (Freiburg: Rombach Verlag, 2014), pp. 115–39; Lucia Ruprecht, 'Anfangsszenen von Autorschaft in Franz Kafkas *Betrachtung*', in *ibid.*, pp. 37–55; Claudia Nitschke, 'Evidenz und Verrätselung: Gesten und *logical turn* in Kafkas *Betrachtung*', in *ibid.*, pp. 141–64.

<sup>5</sup> For example: Andrea Reiter, '"Ich Wollte, Es Wäre Ein Roman": Ruth Klüger's Feminist Survival Report', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 38 (2002), 326–40; Sandra Alfes, 'Voices from a Haunting Past: Ghosts, Memory, and Poetry in Ruth Klüger's *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend* (1992)', *Monatshefte*, 100.4 (2008), 519–33; Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, 'Evolving Memory Narratives: The Transformations of Ruth Klüger's Autobiographical Writing', *Colloquia Germanica*, 48.3 (2015), 183–96; Dominik Hofmann-Wellenhof, 'Ruth Klüger - *weiter leben*', in *Autobiographische Darstellungen von Identitätskrisen im Exil: Frederic*

ambiguous mother-daughter relationship’;<sup>6</sup> other discussions have focussed on the spatialized form of the book and Klüger’s construction of ‘Zeitschaften’, places with distinct meanings at particular times.<sup>7</sup> The scene in which Klüger remembers an encounter with a man on a tram in wartime Vienna brings together all of these concerns – both thematic and formal – in a kind of prism. In miniature, it illustrates the innovative form of Klüger’s writing and the ways in which it combines recollections of disempowerment with belated attempts at re-empowerment. Analysis of this brief passage therefore affords insight into the work as a whole, as well as into modes of mixing retrospection on distant pasts with processes of *Durcharbeitung* in the present in narrative more generally.

Together these scenes enable dialogues between spatial, temporal, and narrative theory. I first consider Kafka’s and Klüger’s surprising similarities in focus and form: both writers concentrate on objectified views of the girls in the trams, regardless of differing narrative perspectives, while the male viewers retreat into a kind of invisibility. This focus means that spatial location is glimpsed only tangentially, and instead female bodies as seen

---

*Mortons und Ruth Klügers Suche nach Brücken in einer neuen Heimat* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2016), pp. 69–130.

<sup>6</sup> Carmel Finnan, ‘Gendered Memory? Cordelia Edvardson’s *Gebranntes Kind Sucht Das Feuer* and Ruth Klüger’s *Weiter Leben*’, in *Autobiography by Women in German*, ed. by Mererid Puw Davies, Beth Linklater, and Gisela Shaw (Berne: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 273–90 (p. 280).

<sup>7</sup> For example: Caroline Schaumann, ‘Trauma and Testimony: Ruth Klüger’s *Weiter Leben*’, in *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany’s Nazi Past in Recent Women’s Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), pp. 98–131; Erica Wickerson, ‘Seeing the Sites: The Topography of Memory and Identity in Ruth Klüger’s *Weiter Leben*’, *Modern Language Review*, 108.1 (2013), 202–20.

by men are used to construct a sense of place. The dichotomy between objectified females and disembodied males also has ramifications for the theatricalized dynamics of these scenes, and here too Kafka and Klüger show similarities. They differ, however, in terms of the manipulation of spatial and temporal perspective: Kafka creates what I call a ‘spatial concertina’, while Klüger creates a ‘temporal concertina’. Both types of ‘concertina’ refer to changes in perspective from the relative here and now. These shifts specifically expand and contract, zooming out and in again in turn. In Kafka’s case, he shifts between wide views of spatial location and abrupt close-ups; Klüger alternates between describing the relative present with times that come before or after this moment. These expansions and contractions inwards and outwards significantly alter the dynamics of the moment described in each scene as well as the narrative point of view. The ‘concertinas’ thus complicate the constructions of gender, identity, and social performance.

A concentration on these two scenes indicates subtle aspects of Kafka’s and Klüger’s idiosyncratic constructions of marginalized selves; the comparison allows broader insights into the public performance of gendered identity through the narrative depiction of bodies in space and time.

### **The objectified girl and the invisible man**

The mobile, enclosed, public contexts of the trams are central aspects of these passages. Yet Kafka and Klüger do not construct straightforwardly mappable spatial locations; instead, they focus on the characters within the scenes, particularly the girls. Despite significantly different historical contexts and narrative perspectives, Kafka and Klüger depict the girls on the trams in strikingly similar ways. Both emphasize colour, shape, costume, and physicality. The effect of this is to create a theatricalized scene with a gendered and imbalanced gaze.

In *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative*, Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu explore the ways in which space can be represented iconically, such as through maps or mappable narrative depictions. They observe that, in *Die Verwandlung*,

Kafka's novella involves space in a strategic role [...] for at least three reasons. First, the transformation of the hero, Gregor Samsa, into an insect renders his human sense of embodiment obsolete and forces him to renegotiate his relation to space. [...]

Second, since the metamorphosis has turned Gregor into an object of horror, especially for his mother, he must keep his new body hidden out of consideration for his family. [...] And third, the apartment must be reorganized to adapt to the new family situation created by the metamorphosis.<sup>8</sup>

Ryan et al.'s discussion about the depiction of space in *Die Verwandlung* coheres with Emily Troscianko's analysis of space in Kafka's *Der Proceß*. Here, Troscianko notes, space appears as the protagonist interacts with it, in other words, in terms of its strategic role: 'The experience of this fictional world is not one of stopping, waiting for a cumulative description, and then carrying on reading about the action. Instead, the narration of action, and by extension of perception, *is* the narration of the world itself'.<sup>9</sup> Ryan et al. suggest that in *Die Verwandlung* the clear depictions of space, and especially the relations between spaces, allow the visual rendering of the plan of the apartment in a reasonably objective way.<sup>10</sup> In *Der Fahrgast* too space is rendered through the characters' interaction with it. The narrator mentions the loop above his head, which he holds for balance, the tram step on which the girl

---

<sup>8</sup> Marie-Laure Ryan, Kenneth Foote, and Maoz Azaryahu, *Narrating Space/Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), p. 64.

<sup>9</sup> Emily Troscianko, *Kafka's Cognitive Realism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 127.

<sup>10</sup> Ryan, Foote, and Azaryahu, p. 64.

waits, the wall she touches, and the floor on which her umbrella is poised. These mentions construct setting through metonymic glimpses. But more emphatically, both Kafka and Klüger create a sense of location and spatial meaning through a concentration on the bodies themselves.

The young woman in *Der Fahrgast* acts as a contrast with the narrator. The narrator feels uncertain of his standing literally on the tram platform and socially in the world, the city, and his family. The girl not only stands on the step, ready to alight, and thus suggestively has a direction, purpose, and imminence, but the hand resting on the wall, and the other on an umbrella resting on the floor, form extra points of contact and stability; she is grounded where the narrator is unstable. As Elizabeth Boa suggests, the woman's posture 'help[s] maintain an open, motionless pose as of an artist's model.'<sup>11</sup> The emphasis on shape and colour further this painterly sense of scene. The narrator notes the girl's black clothing, her white collar, her brown face and hair, and intricate shapes – the folds of the skirt, the collar, the intricate lace, the flat hand, the round and wide nose, the curls of her hair. Boa observes: 'At a time when painters were vying with photography, the scene models a male writer's powers of observation over a female object.'<sup>12</sup> The sepia colours of black, white, and brown enhance the parallel with an early photographic image or the films Kafka enjoyed.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Boa, 'Inside/Outside: Topographies of Self and World in Kafka's *Betrachtung*', in *Kafkas Betrachtung: Neue Lektüren*, pp. 57–78 (p. 77).

<sup>12</sup> Boa, p. 77.

<sup>13</sup> The narrative focus on a young woman, the location on public transport, and the sepia colours recall, for example, *Die weiße Sklavin*, a film seen by Kafka; see: Hanns Zischler, *Kafka geht ins Kino* (München: film&kunst GmbH, Filmmuseum München und Goethe-Institut, 2017).

Spatial location is largely conjured through this focus on bodies, but it is an imbalanced and static focus that objectifies the young woman.

Where Kafka depicts space through the characters' interaction with it rather than as the static backdrop to a scene, Klüger constructs space even more tangentially and abstractly. She mentions the fact that Jews were not allowed to use the seats on the tram, but apart from that, we are given no concrete sense of the location: simply the carriage being 'im Tunnel', then coming 'aus dem Tunnel', and as being 'voll'. (p. 51) This topography of darkness, light, and crowding indicates the partialness of distant memory; the tram in *weiter leben* is the setting for the encounter with a stranger in critical circumstances and it is the encounter and the social significance of space that remain present to Klüger's adult self rather than the particulars of the location. Her focus on bodies, however, is strikingly similar to that of Kafka, and this is surprising both because of their difference in gender identity and because of the identification between Klüger as narrator and Klüger's younger self as agent of experience. Klüger retrospectively reconstructs the autobiographical encounter, involving the distance inevitable in 'the mature reflections of child survivor'.<sup>14</sup> The girl in the scene is her remembered childhood self. Despite the identification between narrator and girl, Klüger – like Kafka – also colourfully objectifies the girl in this scene. Although the opening 'einmal' is temporally vague, she indicates a timeframe through the political meanings of space: 'Einmal, als wir schon den Judenstern trugen, aber noch die öffentlichen Verkehrsmittel, wenn auch nicht die Sitzplätze, benutzen durften, tappte jemand der Stadtbahn im Tunnel nach meiner Hand' (pp. 50-51); this situates the experience in the winter of 1941-1942. The objectification of her younger self emphasizes the particular vulnerability and exposure of a Jewish child at this time in these circumstances.

---

<sup>14</sup> Finnan, p. 278.



Klüger quickly understood the gift of an orange as a gesture of solidarity, a sign of pity for the child wearing a yellow star. This sets up a gestural dialogue between the star and the orange, both of which are brightly coloured and iconically shaped. The emphasis on colours and shapes that have connotations of light recurs throughout the passage: the recollection of the ‘Weihnachstbaum’ (iconically green and decorated with candles) and her trip to the cinema to see the ‘Schneewittchen-Film’ repeat this pattern, all adding to the sense of a wintry atmosphere (orange, star, Christmas, snow). (p. 51) In contrast, the tunnel represents the absence of light and colour. Each one of the colours also assumes anti-Semitic associations. The wearing of the yellow star is a Nazi law, the orange becomes the objectifying and patronizing response to the yellow star, the Christmas tree is seen by Klüger as a threat to her Jewish identity, and both the memory of the trip to see Snow White, where the daughter of the Nazi baker exposed her for illicitly entering the cinema, as well as the anti-Semitic connotations of Walt Disney, inflect this with Nazi associations.<sup>15</sup> The scene is therefore brightly lit, as it were, with symbols of anti-Semitism. The darkness of the tunnel provides the stranger with a cloak for his quiet and ultimately futile gesture, and Klüger further protects him by quickly concealing the orange in her pocket. She on the other hand is left exposed and endangered as a Jewish child.

Klüger recreates the dynamics of the time, with the imbalanced emphasis on passive and objectified child, and active, dominant man, but also subtly challenges the presumptions encoded in the scene. Her account departs from other narrative accounts of ‘acts of kindness to Jews’ on public transport, such as a similar experience told by Inge Deutschkron in her memoir, *Ich trug den gelben Stern* (1978). Deutschkron remembers her first day having to wear the yellow star and travelling by U-Bahn through Berlin. In a display of solidarity, a

---

<sup>15</sup> On the rumours of Disney’s alleged anti-Semitism, see for example: Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Biography* (Croydon: CPI Bookmarque, 2006).

fellow passenger insisted that she take his seat. Deutschkron considered this a benevolent gesture, although she continues, ‘erst als ich ihm zuflüsterte, dass es mir gesetzlich verboten sei und nicht er, sondern ich Gefahr liefe, bestraft zu werden, gab er nach.’<sup>16</sup> She vaguely mentions the man’s appearance (‘ein kleiner, untersetzter Mann’), but not her own, so she remains the viewing subject. The gesture was also public, whereas Klüger’s stranger concealed his in the darkness of the tunnel. The topography of colour, shape, light, and darkness in *weiter leben* is therefore particularly significant not only in the reality of the experience but also in the mimicry in narrative. By recreating herself as the man saw her, Klüger demonstrates how objectifying and reductive the view was.

In both Kafka’s and Klüger’s tram scenes, regardless of the narrative perspective, the girl is thus emphatically objectified. The narration of space and physicality reflects and reinforces the public performance of identity, repeating the sense of exposure. These identities are imposed by dominant male figures onto seemingly passive and powerless females. The repetition in textual form of colour, shape, and light that draws attention to the female characters recreates the imbalanced performance of identity. The narrativization of space and corporeality is therefore performative in Judith Butler’s sense in that it not only articulates but also constitutes identity: the girls are exposed in the text as well as in the spaces of the trams.<sup>17</sup> The geographer Gillian Rose builds on this to suggest that the ‘relationality [of space] is not given between two pre-existing actants’, but it is better ‘to think of such relationalities as performed, as constituted through iteration rather than through

---

<sup>16</sup> Inge Deutschkron, *Ich trug den gelben Stern, und was kam danach?* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009), p. 85.

<sup>17</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 34.

essence'.<sup>18</sup> The relationality between male and female, subject and subjugated, is here constructed through the narrative iteration of space as exposing and objectifying.

Further to this, neither of the female characters seems to have the power of sight. Kafka's description creates a heightened sense of the narrator's perception; the girl appears so vividly to him, it is almost as though he touches her; she is so close, he can see the whorl of her hair and ear. Although there is sensuousness encoded in the mentions of her 'Nase' (smell), 'Hand' (touch), 'Ohr' (sound), and 'Mund' (taste), her eyes are absent. (pp. 26-27) A similar sense of sightlessness occurs in Klüger's scene, even though she is the active agent as the recollecting and narrating self. She creates a colourful and vivid description of herself as an object in the scene, but the man remains effectively in shadow. His gesture is hidden from view, 'darum hatte er's im Tunnel getan', and the man himself is not described in any detail as though Klüger is unable to see or objectify him even in narrative. (p. 51) Denying the power of sight means denying the possibility of reading space, imbuing it with subjective meaning, turning space into place. The space theorist Yi-Fu Tuan posits sight as the most important sense for inhabiting and understanding space: 'It is possible to argue that taste, odour, and even hearing cannot in themselves give us a sense of space', but rather 'the organization of human space is uniquely dependent on sight. Other senses expand and enrich visual space.'<sup>19</sup> The denial of the girls' ability to see underlines this space as a male creation, a product of the agent who can see and give meaning to the physical surroundings. It is performative in its iteration of gendered identities, while also delineated as subjectively directed by the only ones able to make it into 'place', namely dominant, older males.

---

<sup>18</sup> Gillian Rose, 'Performing Space', in *Human Geography Today*, ed. by Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp. 247–59 (pp. 247–48).

<sup>19</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), pp. 11, 16.

The imbalance between woman as object and man as subject brings together the significance of social relations and spatial location, finding echoes in discussions both by philosophers and geographers. In particular, the physical dynamic in Kafka's and Klüger's tram scenes recalls Simone de Beauvoir's reading of Hegel's 'Master-Slave' dialectic. Beauvoir suggests that both the male and the female see the female as an object within the male's perception:

Handsome appearance in the male suggests transcendence; in the female, the passivity of immanence; only the second is intended to arrest the gaze and can hence be captured in the motionless, silvered trap. Man, feeling and wishing himself active, subject, does not see himself in his fixed image; it has little attraction for him, since man's body does not seem to him an object of desire; while woman, knowing and making herself object, believes she really sees *herself* in the glass.<sup>20</sup>

The effect of this, says Beauvoir, is woman's preoccupation with her appearance, her role as object of desire viewed by the man. The corollary of the objectification of woman is that man remains unencumbered by his corporality, able to maintain his position as subject. As the geographer Linda McDowell writes:

Women are seen as closer to nature, as irrational, as polluters, as sacred but as inferior because they menstruate and because of their ability to bear children. Men, on the other hand, are seen as civilized, rational and superior, mind to women's body, even, indeed, unbodied or disembodied.<sup>21</sup>

This privilege of male disembodiment is constructed in *Der Fahrgast* and *weiter leben*, enhancing the gendered performance encoded in space.

---

<sup>20</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Vintage, 1997), pp. 642–43.

<sup>21</sup> Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 44.

The silent body has a certain kind of eloquence in Kafka's *Betrachtung* that is both metonymic and metaphorical.<sup>22</sup> In *Der Fahrgast*, this can be further refined by considering the difference in bodily description between the male narrator and the female object of the gaze. The narrator associates the girl with positive and clear attributes such as 'bereit' and 'deutlich', thus rendering her even more visible, while he is defined by terms of negation such as 'unsicher', 'nicht beiläufig', 'gar nicht', 'niemand'. (p. 26) He becomes almost a non-entity. In contrast to the girl's solid points of contact with the step (two legs and an umbrella positioned there) and the wall (with a hand touching it), the narrator is passively and precariously carried both by the tram and by the loop above him, and this wobbly hand is the only explicit mention of corporeality that we have of him.

Similarly, the man in Klüger's scene appears disembodied. Klüger emphasizes the man's bodily absence by never referring to him in the same way twice: she calls him 'ein Mann', 'dieser Mann', 'der Fremde', 'der Spender', 'dieser Mensch', and 'ein Fremde[r]'. (pp. 51-52) These descriptions shift between the definite and indefinite article, with the overall effect of making the person into a non-entity, much like Kafka's narrator. This simultaneously compounds and reverses Klüger's experience of sexism, even in post-war America as a Holocaust survivor, where, for example, her husband's students had no interest in hearing her memories as a survivor of the Holocaust, but rather only his as an American pilot.<sup>23</sup> In this tram encounter, a profound moment of objectification – as a child, as Jewish, as female – Klüger makes the male agent an invisible nobody, but he still has the power to dictate the action of the scene.

---

<sup>22</sup> Nitschke, 'Evidenz und Verrätselung: Gesten und *logical turn* in Kafkas *Betrachtung*', in *Kafkas Betrachtung: Neue Lektüren*, ed. by Carolin Duttlinger and Dora Osborne, pp. 141–64 (p. 143).

<sup>23</sup> Hofmann-Wellenhof, pp. 70–71.

In both scenes, the men are subjects and viewers and yet they themselves remain unseen, while the objects of their gaze are seemingly sightless and colourfully exposed both in the trams and in the texts. The construction of corporeality and space thereby reflects and embodies gendered performances of identity. But, as *Der Fahrgast* and *weiter leben* show, the dichotomy between assured male subject and passive female object is not straightforward.

Beauvoir and feminist geographers view male disembodiment as a form of empowerment, the possibility of seeing, thinking, and acting as opposed to being seen, remaining passive, and existing only relationally, and this has been much discussed with reference to modernism in particular.<sup>24</sup> But the imbalance of female exposure and male disembodiment in *Der Fahrgast* and *weiter leben* is intricate and ambiguous.

Kafka's narrator is not presented straightforwardly as the dominant male agent, despite the narrative view of space and physicality that moulds him as such. He is uncertain in multiple senses. There are two points in the scene which alert us to further ambiguities in the power dynamic displayed here. First, the thought that frames his physical position posits him in a strange relation to those around him:

Ich kann es gar nicht verteidigen, dass ich auf dieser Plattform stehe, mich an dieser Schlinge halte, von diesem Wagen mich tragen lasse, dass Leute dem Wagen ausweichen oder still gehn oder vor den Schaufenstern ruhn. – Niemand verlangt es ja von mir, aber das ist gleichgültig. (p. 26)

Second, he closes the story with a retrospective question: 'Ich fragte mich damals: Wieso kommt es, dass sie nicht über sich verwundert ist, dass sie den Mund geschlossen hält und

---

<sup>24</sup> See for example: McDowell, *Gender, Identity, and Place*; Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007); Rose, 'Performing Space'; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988).

nichts dergleichen sagt'. (p. 27) Both of these moments display an attempted exchange with others that is frustrated.

Where Beauvoir considers the significance of viewing and being viewed from a feminist perspective, Jean-Paul Sartre offers an interesting counterpoint that complicates the analysis of gender and space here. Sartre's discussion of 'the look' suggests that the viewer must recognize himself as the object of the Other's gaze in order to become aware of the Other's subjecthood. In Sartre's words: 'It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject'.<sup>25</sup> He continues:

A radical conversion of the Other is necessary if he is to escape objectivity [...]

"Being-seen-by-the-Other" is the truth of "seeing-the-Other." Thus the notion of the Other can not under any circumstances aim at a solitary, extra-mundane consciousness which I can not even think. The man is defined by his relation to the world and by his relation to myself.<sup>26</sup>

He suggests that knowing we are being looked at makes us aware of our own vulnerability:

What I apprehend immediately when I hear the branches crackling behind me is not that *there is someone there*; it is that I am vulnerable, that I have a body which can be hurt, that I occupy a place and that I can not in any case escape from the space in which I am without defence – in short, that I *am seen*.<sup>27</sup>

Sartre gives the example of the viewer at the keyhole, who, for various possible reasons, looks into the room behind the door, and his consciousness is entirely occupied with this

---

<sup>25</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 280.

<sup>26</sup> Sartre, pp. 280–81.

<sup>27</sup> Sartre, p. 282.

sight. 'But all of a sudden', he writes, 'I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? [...] I see *myself*' because *somebody* sees me'.<sup>28</sup> This in turn elicits a sense of shame: 'Now, shame [...] is shame of *self*; it is the *recognition* of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging [...] I am this being. I do not for an instant think of denying it; my shame is my confession.'<sup>29</sup>

Read in this light, Kafka's narrator also desires *to be seen*; indeed, why else would he tell the story? His thought that he is unable to defend himself against an external judgement is reminiscent of Sartre's voyeur at the keyhole. The narrator is watching and waiting to be apprehended as the object of someone else's gaze, but he is not seen. He experiences the shame without the recognition and this exacerbates his sense of instability. In turn, his subjecthood is not recognized by the Other, because she does not see him and thus apprehend herself as the object of his gaze. The narrator may entrap the girl in his space, his conception of place, but he also experiences existential angst rather than the privilege of male disembodiment. The imbalanced construction of space and embodiment thus reflects the complex marginalization experienced by a seemingly empowered self who nevertheless remains effectively unacknowledged at the voyeuristic keyhole.

In the tram scene in *weiter leben*, the relationality of the gaze also complicates constructions of power and identity. Klüger's only indication of the man's embodiment or of her ability to return his stare is in the sentence, 'ich [...] sah dankbar zu dem Fremden auf, wie er wohlwollend auf mich herunterschaute'. (p. 51) Her gaze does not simply make him the object of the view because he returns the look. But he also does more than that: he specifically looks *down* at Klüger. The direction 'herunter', which constructs a subtle relationality between looks exchanged, moulds this moment as a further gestural subjugation,

---

<sup>28</sup> Sartre, p. 284.

<sup>29</sup> Sartre, p. 285.



denying Klüger's ability to respond as subject and viewer. The man's downwards gaze and his 'wohlwollend' expression suggest his two-dimensional reading of the situation. In his eyes, Klüger is diminutive, pitiable, and only capable of one response, and to this expectation she theatrically conforms as she looks gratefully back, though notably *not* specifically *up* at him. As Klüger retells the scene to her mother, she meets another kind of objectifying gaze. Her mother acts as belated audience to the scene played by the stranger and Klüger. She offers a different reading again: 'Wir sind keine Bettler', attributing to Klüger an agency of instigation that did not occur. (p. 52) Her mother's look as 'starr' metaphorically points to the inflexibility of her reading of the event; she looks 'ins Leere' rather than at Klüger. (p. 52) This pits the man's belief in his pure gratitude-eliciting benevolence against the mother's view of outrage and humiliation. One looks down, the other looks rigidly past. Klüger is exposed by the man yet unseen by her mother. As Klüger turns to the reader and says, 'Aber es war doch ein Dilemma, oder?' she adds a complexity that rejects both of the patronizing and simplistic gazes of the adults around her. (p. 52)

Thus, where Kafka complicates the image of the empowered male subject, Klüger adds ambiguity to the vision of disempowered female object. Both writers indicate the subtleties encoded in these seemingly dichotomous performances of gender and identity as projected through the dynamics of viewing.

### **The cinematic spectacle**

These constructions of female and male bodies in the shared space of the tram are further complicated by the dynamic of theatrical performance. Theories of gender, space, and cinema coincide at this point to illustrate the ways in which the topographies of colour, light, and darkness also have a theatrical effect that adds complexity to the social relations in these passages. In her discussion of the cinema, Laura Mulvey suggests that 'the extreme contrast between the darkness in the auditorium [...] and the brilliance of the shifting patterns of light

and shade on the screen helps to promote the illusion of voyeuristic separation'.<sup>30</sup> This same contrast is visible in both Kafka's and Klüger's scenes with brightly lit, colourful objects, and shadowy, invisible viewers. This cinematic structure has other more explicit resonances in these passages.

Lucia Ruprecht notes that the theatrical character of Kafka's *Betrachtung* is also reflected in the description of the texts as 'Stückchen': '*Betrachtung* wird zum Schauplatz von Identitätsszenen, von immer auch entstellenden Vorstellungsgesten eines Autors, der sich zum ersten Mal in Buchform der Öffentlichkeit präsentiert.'<sup>31</sup> Ruprecht suggests that the theatricalization rests too on the focus on the body and the language of gesture, though 'Interpretationsmöglichkeiten' are opened up but not confirmed.<sup>32</sup> In *Der Fahrgast*, moreover, the depiction of the body evokes early cinematic technique. The abrupt close-up view of the girl, for example, echoes the point of view used repeatedly in the 1911 short film 'Nick Winter und der Diebstahl der Mona Lisa', watched and enjoyed by Kafka.<sup>33</sup> Peter André Alt observes of *Der Fahrgast*: 'Das besondere Merkmal der Passage liegt darin, dass der Ich-Erzähler hinter der Perspektive der imaginären Kamera verschwindet, um seine Observationshaltung möglichst genau auf das Objekt einstellen zu können.'<sup>34</sup> But Kafka's narrator is more passive, uninvolved, and impotent than a director 'hinter [...] der imaginären

---

<sup>30</sup> Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 833–44 (p. 836).

<sup>31</sup> Ruprecht, 'Anfangsszenen von Autorschaft in Franz Kafkas *Betrachtung*', in *Kafkas Betrachtung*, ed. by Duttlinger and Osborne, pp. 37–55 (p. 42).

<sup>32</sup> Ruprecht, p. 42.

<sup>33</sup> Zischler.

<sup>34</sup> Alt, pp. 41–42.

Kamera' might be; he is the cinema audience placed only just within our view. According to Mulvey, the (typically) male protagonist on the cinema screen allows the privileged male spectator to become vicariously involved in the action of the film through identification: the spectator 'projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.'<sup>35</sup> Because Kafka's narrator is positioned simultaneously as intradiegetic character and extradiegetic spectator, this split self, this process of identification, and vicarious involvement through a more powerful/braver/more charismatic version of oneself cannot occur. Mulvey says that 'the character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator'.<sup>36</sup> But this is precisely what frustrates Kafka's narrator; the expected developments do not occur because there is no omnipotent, intradiegetic protagonist to instigate an exchange with the viewed girl on behalf of the impotent spectator.

The theatrical parallels have a very different function in *weiter leben*. Part of Klüger's autobiographical project is to speak out both against those who refuse to listen and also against the homogenizing and reductive 'Museumskultur' that threatens to displace authentic experience. Klüger writes: 'Es liegt dieser Museumskultur ein tiefer Aberglaube zugrunde, nämlich daß die Gespenster gerade dort zu fassen seien, wo sie als Lebende aufhörten zu sein.' (p. 76) To return to sites of past atrocities, requires 'schon mehr Phantasie, als die meisten haben, um sich vorzustellen, was dort vor vierzig Jahren gespielt wurde.' (p. 77) The dialogue between the self of recollected experience and the retrospective narrative voice balances the demands of reconstructing traumatic experiences of the past and altering their significance in the present. Where Klüger suggests that the culture of memorialization

---

<sup>35</sup> Mulvey, p. 838.

<sup>36</sup> Mulvey, p. 838.

threatens to replace subjective experience with a sanitized and inaccurate collectivized retelling of the past, she also frequently shapes her own memories with a kind theatricalization. She thereby combines the memory of vulnerability and threat with a retrospective strategy of mitigating and recasting that threat.

In the tram, there is a stark contrast between the dark tunnel and the bright star and orange. The contrast constructs a theatrical topography: the curtain rises and the spotlights are on, a topography of exposure with Klüger's younger self centre stage, but also one, as Klüger acknowledges, of conscious performance. She uses the language of theatre: 'ich gefiel mir nicht in dieser Rolle', 'eine Szene, in der ich die mir zugeteilte Rolle des dankbaren Judenkindes doch mit einer gewissen Überzeugung gespielt hatte'; and the yellow star acts as a costume she is forced to wear, which displays her role for the audience on the tram and the other player in the scene. (pp. 51-52) She responds to the man with gratitude but tells the reader 'meine Gefühle waren aber gemischt'. (p. 51) Her mother's reaction compounds this sense of disempowerment with a series of rhetorical questions "'Was fällt dir ein, Geschenke von Fremden auf der Straßenbahn anzunehmen? [...] Kriegst du nicht genug zu essen?'" (p. 52) Klüger is doubly silenced, again forced into a particular role, unable to respond to her mother's anger: 'es war doch ein Dilemma, oder? Keines, das ich mit ihr besprechen konnte'. (p. 52) The focus on her storytelling and the impossibility of transgressing from the man's or her mother's script further mould this as a moment of performance, where Klüger is playing a public role that diminishes her sense of individual subjectivity. By shaping the scene as a kind of theatre and then ending with questions to the reader, Klüger demonstrates the reductive artifice of the subjugating forces around her, while belatedly attempting a response.

Kafka and Klüger both employ – and then subvert – cinematic or theatrical parallels, both emphasizing the significance of performance. In Kafka's case, this mode of representing space undermines his position as dominant male viewer; in Klüger's case, it has the very different effect of offering belated empowerment.

## **Spatial and temporal concertinas**

There are significant differences not only in the narrative perspectives of these scenes, but specifically in the subtle *transformations* of these perspectives. Kafka and Klüger both distinguish between the objectified girl and the invisible male observer, and this topography of viewer and viewed, and light and darkness creates theatricalized atmospheres. But the two scenes differ in terms of the manipulation of space and time. Kafka varies spatial point of view, while Klüger creates an oscillating temporal perspective. I term these effects ‘spatial’ and ‘temporal concertinas’, and they alter the significance of the scenes.

The power dynamics encoded in descriptions of space and the body are respectively reinforced or mitigated through the retroactive performance of narration. Both narrators end on a note of ambivalence. Kafka’s narrator shifts tense and questions why the girl did not respond as he expected her to: ‘Ich fragte mich damals: Wieso kommt es, daß sie nicht über sich verwundert ist, daß sie den Mund geschlossen hält und nichts dergleichen sagt.’ (p. 27) Klüger responds to her mother’s angry outburst with a series of rhetorical questions to the reader about the dilemma she faced:

Hätte ich grad diesen Menschen, der es ja gut gemeint hatte, gefährden sollen?

Anderseits: Hatte ich nicht auch meinen Spaß gehabt bei dem Abenteuer einer kleinen Verschwörung zwischen mir und einem Fremden, eine Szene, in der ich die mir zugeteilte Rolle des dankbaren Judenkindes doch mit einer gewissen Überzeugung gespielt hatte? (p. 52)

The closing lines of both passages temper what we have just read, retroactively imbuing the scenes with ambiguity. But this closing ambiguity also reminds us of the presence of the narrators beyond the action on the trams. Both give a different temporal perspective by shifting from the moment of the tram encounter to a retrospective discussion of the event.

Further to this, Kafka's 'spatial concertina' involves an oscillating move *in perspective* between seemingly wide and seemingly enclosed spaces. The emphasis on perspective here is crucial: the space does not itself change, but the narrative view of it does. In his narratological approach to time, Genette distinguishes between the 'psychological connotations of such terms as "anticipation" or "retrospection" which automatically evoke subjective phenomena' and what he names 'prolepsis' and 'analepsis'.<sup>37</sup> This is the difference between shifts in perspective and shifts in temporal location. Here I refer to a similar kind of distinction but for space rather than time. This gives the effect of an oscillating zoom lens, a cinematic style Alt suggests arises from early cinema's desire to illustrate the range of technical possibilities.<sup>38</sup>

The two characters share the same space, but they inhabit it in seemingly different ways. The distinction contributes to the ambiguity identified by Nitschke, the simultaneous objectification or de-emotionalization afforded by cinematic techniques transposed onto narrative, as well as the emotively loaded possibilities of bodies and gesture.<sup>39</sup> Much of the (presumed) externalization of subjectivity stems from the contrast between the narrator and the young woman he views. The narrator notes his uncertainty 'in dieser Welt, in dieser Stadt, in meiner Familie', starting with a world-wide view, and rapidly moving in. (p. 26) His seemingly disembodied state and social uncertainty create a wide and nebulous view of space. Because we cannot see him, his location is not fixed or limited. The girl by contrast is narrow and specific. Not only is she firmly grounded with multiple points of contact with the tram, but descriptive words emphasize a sense of containment: her blouse is 'knapp', the

---

<sup>37</sup> Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), pp. 39–40.

<sup>38</sup> Alt, p. 20; see also: Horstkotte, pp. 121–22.

<sup>39</sup> Nitschke, p. 142.

sides of her nose are ‘schwach gepreßt’, her ear ‘liegt eng an’, she keeps her mouth ‘geschlossen’. (pp. 27-27) Such words indicate a narrow view bordering on entrapment. The implication that she is about to leave the tram and step into the open suggests that this enclosed sense of space will imminently change; she will be the one out in the world, in the city. But for now, at least, she is contained. Such language, sensuous, erotic, and entrapping, can be found too in Kafka’s diary entries. His entry of 9 July 1912 for example reads: ‘2 schöne schwedische Jungen mit langen Beinen, die so geformt und gespannt sind, dass man nur mit der Zunge richtig an ihnen hinfahren konnte.’<sup>40</sup> Just as the gaze in *Der Fahrgast* seems to grow hands with which to touch the young woman on the step, Kafka’s remarks in his diary entry almost attribute the sense of taste to his eyes. The boys’ legs are ‘geformt und gespannt’, again creating a sense of tightness and containment. In *Der Fahrgast*, the tightness waiting to spring is pitted in stark contrast to the narrator’s ungrounded, wide, and nebulous mode of inhabiting space. This construction of a ‘spatial concertina’, whereby spatial view changes from broad to narrow, suggests the narrator’s desire to contain the girl he views, a desire that will inevitably be confounded when she leaves the tram.

These subtle changes in spatial perspective also have ramifications for time. The imminence of her departure coupled with the retrospective remark about her failure to respond elevate the girl onto a strange temporal plane. Boa identifies the ‘evocation of a timeless present moment’ on the ‘liminal space’ provided by the tram platform.<sup>41</sup> But the young woman’s temporality also extends in both other directions; she simultaneously occupies the present of the tram, the future of leaving at the next stop, and the past in her failure to respond ‘back then’. The description of her body with words connoting tightness,

---

<sup>40</sup> Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher*, ed. by Hans-Gerd Koch, Michael Müller, and Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1990), p. 1041.

<sup>41</sup> Boa, pp. 77–78.

coupled with her posture as ready to alight, lead in turn to her almost mythical ability to occupy multiple time-frames.

This enriched temporality recalls and extends Doreen Massey's discussion of the reductive view of space as a 'slice through time', static and concrete in contrast to time's dynamism.<sup>42</sup> She argues that we must 'think[...] of space as the sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories, imagining a train journey (for example) as a speeding across on-going stories'.<sup>43</sup> This example is particularly apt for the discussion of the tram scenes here; the shared, enclosed but mobile space of public transport where trajectories intersect for a moment. And again, the surface view of *Der Fahrgast* appears to construct a slice of space through time, a static moment, with a girl frozen in perpetuity. But instead, the complex nature of the gaze, the intricate construction of bodies in space inflect this enclosed space with dynamism, and the implication of unknown pasts and future trajectories. Massey's *For Space* makes the particular argument for rescuing space from the reductive associations with stasis and passivity, but this argument also has a feminist dimension in the context of *Der Fahrgast*. At first glance, it seems that Kafka's narrator stands for time – mobile, ungrounded, felt, but not seen – while the girl represents space – static, grounded, contained, viewable. The construction of the 'spatial concertina', with the oscillating modes of inhabiting space and the implication of imminent changes, works symbiotically with the temporal flow, emphasizing the apparently enviable and potentially empowered possibilities of the objectified girl. The narrative view and the traditional trajectory of the male gaze are therefore upset by the intricate and shifting modes of constructing space and, by implication, also time.

Klüger, by contrast, subtly alters perspective by shifting times rather than spatial point of view. She proposes the concept of the 'Zeitschaft', 'um zu vermitteln, was ein Ort in der

---

<sup>42</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005), p. 119.

<sup>43</sup> Massey, *For Space*, p. 119.



Zeit ist, zu einer gewissen Zeit, weder vorher noch nachher [...] Ort in der Zeit, die nicht mehr ist.' (pp. 78-79) Von der Lüche suggests that the spatial focus of the novel is central to its attempt to work through gaps, missing people and moments and the impossibility of their retrieval:

In der Auseinandersetzung mit erlebten und durchdachten Aporien findet Ruth Klüger nicht nur ein Thema, sondern auch eine Form. Gerade mit der Form ihrer Autobiographie reagiert sie auf die Erfahrung der Aporie: die fünf Teile werden nach fünf verschiedenen Orten (Wien – Die Lager – Deutschland – New York – Göttingen) benannt.<sup>44</sup>

*weiter leben* moves through different locations in space with general chronological linearity. But the dialogue Klüger opens between her narrating self and her past self of experience fragments temporal order. As Finnan writes, 'the break in linear narrative sequence [...] reflects the rupture between past experiences and narrative present. It reinforces the reality of discontinuity of experience as well as the dislocation and fragmentation of the lives being reconstructed.'<sup>45</sup> In the tram scene in particular, the oscillation between multiple times illustrates the way in which Klüger tempers the recollection of subjugation with the belated attempt at empowerment. I term this oscillation the 'temporal concertina'. In contrast to Kafka's 'spatial concertina', Klüger rapidly shifts between timeframes, subtly altering perspective and relieving the sense of past enclosure.

---

<sup>44</sup> Irmela von der Lüche, 'Das Gefängnis der Erinnerung: Erzählstrategien gegen den Konsum des Schreckens in Ruth Klügers *weiter leben*', in *Bilder des Holocaust: Literatur, Film, Bildende Kunst*, ed. by Manuel Köppen and Klaus R. Scherpe (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1997), pp. 29–45 (p. 35).

<sup>45</sup> Finnan, p. 278.

Both the spatial and temporal ruptures visible across the book as a whole occur in a kind of prism in this scene. The ‘einmal’ of the first sentence opens the time with a broad, imprecise timeframe, but Klüger quickly moves in to a specific point through the regulations placed on Jews in terms of public dress and prohibitions in space at this time. This sets up a mould for the passage overall, with rapid shifts in and out of the relative present. Klüger narrates the scene as follows: she locates the experience ‘[in] der Stadtbahn’ and specifically ‘im Tunnel’; she then recalls ‘eine Bildserie mit Versen’ she had read ‘erst neulich’ in the newspaper; she continues her account ‘als der Zug aus dem Tunnel herausfuhr’; then mentions the relatively recent incident ‘beim Zuckerl vom Weihnachtsbaum’, where the maid offered her a sweet with overtly Christian connotations; she returns to ‘der Spender’ on the tram; then compares this incident to ‘die tröstenden Worte der Platzanweiserin beim Schneewittchen-Film’; goes back to the location ‘in der vollen Straßenbahn’; then explains ‘so ungefähr erklärte ich den Vorfall meiner Mutter, als ich mit der unerwünschten Gabe und der dazugehörigen Geschichte nach Hause kam’; she ends by addressing the reader. (pp. 51-52) Although this passage is predominantly located in the tram, Klüger’s mode of narration creates an abrupt series of what Genette calls ‘metalepses’, which refer to the ‘transition from one narrative level to another’.<sup>46</sup> These include ‘analepses’, which involve ‘any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment’, and ‘prolepses’, which refer to ‘any narrative manoeuvre that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later’.<sup>47</sup> Klüger also makes use of the ‘extradiegetic mode’, where she discusses the dilemma more analytically, rhetorically questioning the reader in the narrating present.<sup>48</sup> This shapes the scene into the following

---

<sup>46</sup> Genette, pp. 234–35.

<sup>47</sup> Genette, p. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Genette, p. 228.

sequence: tram (relative present) – newspaper rhyme (analepsis) – tram (relative present) – Christmas tree (analepsis) – tram (relative present) – mother’s anger (a spatial shift that indicates a temporal progression, not a straightforward prolepsis) – address to the reader (extradiegetic mode in the narrating present). Thus, time rapidly moves in and out of the relative present and the space of the tram. The other incidents mentioned (the antisemitic rhyme, sweet from the Christmas tree, and the Snow White film) are also subjugating, yet the swift temporal shifts and juxtapositions fragment the sense of subjugation and emphasize Klüger’s agency as narrator. This alters the power imbalance of each individual recollection and eases the sense of spatial entrapment.

Kafka and Klüger both employ subtle shifts in perspective in ways that create dialogues between narrating and experiencing selves. But in Kafka’s case, the perspectival shifts are spatial and serve to intensify his sense of precariousness, whereas Klüger’s perspectival shifts in time both mitigate the threatening dynamic of power that was imposed upon her, and also demonstrate the difference between spaces as they are lived at the time and spaces as they are later remembered; she only has the power to alter the dynamic because the spaces – with the meanings they once had – no longer exist.

## **Conclusion**

Both of these tram scenes are about a kind of silence and a kind of stasis: they show encounters that do not quite happen within the seemingly prosaic and transitory confines of public transport. But Kafka and Klüger conjure multiple subjectivities from multiple perspectives, changing through time and space. Through descriptions of bodies, and spatial and temporal topography, they present precarious selves and attempts to redress power imbalances. The depiction of space in these scenes reflects and embodies the public performance of identity, that which is imposed by dominant agents onto subjugated selves. The depiction of time offers a different perspective, illustrating tacit aspects of subjective

experience that are otherwise hidden. Kafka and Klüger both show dominant male viewers, unencumbered by corporeality and unseen by the reader, in contrast with colourfully exposed girls, objectified by the gaze and by the text. But the cinematic connotations of these scenes alter the seemingly dichotomous power dynamics created by the gaze. Kafka's narrator occupies neither the position of cinema spectator nor that of cinematic male protagonist; he fails to participate in the action either vicariously or intradiegetically, but instead hovers on the margins. Klüger's overt cinematic parallels highlight the futility of the stranger's gesture of pity on the tram and the performative aspect of social relations more generally. This retrospective mode of suggesting parallels with fiction also forms part of a wider project across the book that indicates both the senselessness of the Holocaust and Klüger's belated attempt to consign her traumatic memories to the realm of fairytale safety. Kafka's 'spatial concertina' and Klüger's 'temporal concertina' have broader ramifications for readings of society and literature. Their subtly shifting perspectives on space and time indicate tensions between who we seem to be and what that actually feels like. These scenes are brief and enclosed in the tram carriages and in the texts. They may be unique in their individual portrayals of marginalized identities at critical moments in space and time, on the brink of World War One and early in World War Two respectively, but they also point to aspects of self and other, objectivity and subjectivity, and identity and experience that are of wider significance. They turn a set of apparent binaries into a complex conglomeration of public performances and private selves, ever changing across time and space.

St John's College, Cambridge

Erica Wickerson

St John's College

Cambridge

CB2 1TP

ehf20@cam.ac.uk